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on Thursday, 15 October 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. HAYES (Ireland)
(Vice-President)

- Social Development: (a) Questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family [93] (continued)

  International Conference on Ageing and celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing:

  (i) Reports of the Secretary-General
  (ii) Draft resolution

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Hayes (Ireland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 93 (continued)

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: (a) QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AGEING AND CELEBRATION OF THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING:

(i) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/47/339, A/47/369)

(ii) DRAFT RESOLUTION (A/47/L.5/Rev.1)

The PRESIDENT: This morning, the General Assembly, in accordance with the decision taken at its 3rd plenary meeting and pursuant to resolution 46/91, is holding the first of the plenary meetings devoted to an international conference on ageing and to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, under sub-item (a) of agenda item 93.

In this connection, the Assembly has before it two reports of the Secretary-General, one on global targets on ageing for the year 2001, contained in document A/47/339, and the other on the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, contained in document A/47/369. The Assembly also has before it a draft resolution, which has been issued as document A/47/L.5/Rev.1.

Mr. Ganev regrets not being present at this meeting, owing to other pressing responsibilities, and he has asked me to deliver, on his behalf, the following statement on the occasion of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

In the 10 years since the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, over 100 million persons of the world population have become older

(The President)

persons, in the sense that they have reached the age of 60 years or over. Nearly 70 per cent of them live in developing countries. The increase in those aged 80 and above will be the most striking - from 1980 to 2001 the number is projected to increase by 54 per cent, although during this time the overall population is expected to increase by only 29 per cent. It is projected that by the middle of the second decade of the next century there will be over 1 billion persons aged 60 and above.

The present debate offers an opportunity to examine the impact of an ageing population on national life, infrastructure and resources. It also offers an opportunity for Member States to reaffirm their commitment to international and multisectoral collaboration on ageing in the decade ahead.

In the last 10 years the international community has witnessed the ageing of the world's population at a dramatic rate, which has a range of far-reaching social, economic and developmental consequences. In fact, it is potentially one of the most serious socio-economic issues of the next decade. It challenges both developed and developing countries. It concerns each stratum of society.

Ageing is often viewed as an economic burden. The question is, on the one hand, whether ageing is to become a problem, a burden upon the young, a nightmare of escalating costs to support an increasingly dependent population, or, on the other hand, whether ageing is to be considered a celebration of the twentieth century, a success story of reduced mortality rates and increased longevity. The kinds of public policies adopted will determine the way this issue will unfold.

The responsibility for meeting the challenges posed by the increasing rate of the ageing of the world's population is therefore not just for the old: it is a responsibility for us all.

(The President)

While the International Plan of Action on Ageing provides a multidimensional framework for a global programme, its success depends on the actions taken by those responsible for its implementation: first and foremost, Member States, which have responsibility for legislating and implementing social programmes; and the non-governmental and other organizations both for and of the elderly.

Progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action has been uneven in different regions of the world and, on an international scale, unfortunately not very impressive. Attention has tended to focus on awareness-raising and advocacy, which in themselves are of cardinal importance. Yet this has not been sufficiently translated into actual programmes that have an impact on older persons.

The major task for the decade 1992 to 2001 therefore lies in making the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing more effective in the context of national priorities and on the basis of available resources.

As the ageing issue is debated here today and tomorrow, special emphasis must be placed on the responsibility of the Member States, in partnership with international organizations and non-governmental organizations, to respond to the ageing of populations. While the ageing of populations can be predicted with relative certainty, timely adjustment of social and economic infrastructure is likely, regrettably, to lag behind - seriously in many places. Therein lies the challenge for individual countries and the international community.

The 1982 World Assembly on Ageing was one of the first occasions when the ageing issue and its global impact and importance was addressed by the international community. The consensus at that meeting was that something had

(The President)

to be done before it was too late. Let me conclude by saying that policies and partnerships, ideas and initiative are imperative to set the future tone on this issue as we enter into the next decade.

I now call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: It gives me great pleasure to open this special plenary meeting of the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly. This is the first time the Assembly has addressed, in plenary, the question of population ageing. It is therefore an important occasion. I welcome participating delegations, and particularly the representatives of organizations of the elderly.

Between 1950 and the year 2025 the world population is projected to increase by a factor of three; those aged 60 and above, by a factor of six; and those aged 80 and above by a factor of 10. While the changes occurred first in developed countries, they are now beginning to be felt in developing countries as well.

Population ageing is indeed an unprecedented demographic phenomenon. It has far-reaching ramifications. Work patterns, employment practices, health services, education and family policies are affected.

(The Secretary-General)

Population ageing is therefore a challenge to world society as much as to national societies. It is a highly appropriate issue for this Organization to tackle.

Ten years ago, over a thousand delegates from 124 Member States gathered at the World Assembly on Ageing, in Vienna. The World Assembly adopted the International Plan of Action on Ageing subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly.

The United Nations has promoted the Plan and monitored its implementation. The Secretariat formulated an Action Programme on Aging for 1992. In adopting it, the General Assembly called for a practical strategy on ageing for the next decade. I commend to you the document "Global targets on ageing for the year 2001".

The global targets seek to make effective use of existing infrastructures, programmes and scheduled events for promoting implementation of the Plan of Action in the years ahead. They identify opportunities for integrating ageing into the mainstream of development. They aim to expand the range of the United Nations Programme on Ageing without incurring major financial obligations. They are an attempt at divising a long-term practical global strategy for ageing. We must test this strategy in the coming years.

It is a pleasant duty on the occasion of the tenth anniversary to thank all those who have contributed to the United Nations Programme on Ageing. Member States and their institutions and committees concerned with ageing have been partners in a collective effort. I pay tribute to the many non-governmental organizations, associations of older persons, and research and training institutions which have been so generous in their efforts. I acknowledge with satisfaction the increasing efforts of the specialized

(The Secretary-General)

agencies and bodies of the United Nations system to serve the needs of Member States as effectively as possible.

The decade ahead will need all our energies, expertise and good will as we help each other adjust our thinking, planning, resource allocation and practical actions for what is often called "the age of ageing".

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary it is also a particular pleasure to greet the eminent personalities whom I have invited as my special guests to observe the work of the plenary meetings. Some of them participated in drafting the International Plan of Action on Ageing and in preparing the draft Global Targets on ageing for the year 2001. All have made a valuable contribution to the United Nations Programme on Ageing at national or international levels.

(spoke in French)

The last decade has posed the whole question of ageing in new terms. In the past a shadow of commiseration had long veiled developed societies' view of the elderly. One example of this, among a thousand others, is Victor Hugo's phrase "to grow old is see the fading of the light". On the other hand, more traditional societies in the third world consider age more favourably. The demographic evolution to which I referred a few moments ago will undoubtedly once again, everywhere in the world, bring into prominence this positive attitude towards age. Perhaps one of the main objectives of our programme for the coming decade is to share this conception of ageing, which thus could well become universal.

The cult of youth, this obsession that has so rightly been described by the word "youthism" has its inherent dangers. It has of course made a certain contribution to the dynamism of modern societies, but it has also essentially relegated to the background everything that is not young or can no longer

(The Secretary-General)

pretend to be. There is no doubt that we have over-exulted a society in which things do not take sufficient time to grow old, in which people can no longer afford to own up to the fact that they are growing old. In the passage of time, in age, in personal acceptance of age, we have something full of promise - promise for everyone: the benefit of experience, of maturity and of knowledge and wisdom.

What is more, this is full of promise for society at large, because it is to be hoped that if more prominence is given to the elderly it will help us to re-establish a balance in our own rhythms. In particular, during the Rio Conference it was quite clear that an excessive spirit of conquest might drag the world to its perdition.

What we have here is a minor psychological revolution: to give time time for itself. This means we must have a new approach to ourselves, a better understanding of all ages of life, striking a balance between the spirit of conquest and the spirit of maturity. Let us take the time to live. Let us take the time to grow old.

The twentieth century has its shadows; it also has its light. Because of the progress made in science and technology, it has succeeded in extending the duration of life. This is a victory. But it will remain an imperfect victory if at the same time we do not have a positive attitude towards aging.

These extra years we have won for ourselves should be full years - that is, they should should be useful to others, they should be creative. They should create the future. Only then will this victory be complete. We have to work at this maturing process in the next 10 years.

I believe the main effort required is psychological. I say "believe" because I have no hard and fast ideas on this subject. I hope I will in a few

(The Secretary-General)

years time, particularly after your debates. May your work therefore be both lively and fruitful. Good luck!

The PRESIDENT: Before I call on the first speaker for this morning I should like to propose that the list of speakers in the debate be closed today at 6 p.m. If I hear no objection to this proposal, it will be so decided.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: I therefore request those representatives wishing to participate in this debate to inscribe themselves on the list of speakers as soon as possible.

I call first on the representative of the United States of America, Mr. Louis W. Sullivan, Secretary of Health and Human Services, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Mr. SULLIVAN (United States of America): It is my honour to speak as the representative of the host country. As always, the United States regards it a privilege to host the many representatives from all parts of the world to the United Nations General Assembly.

As we commemorate the tenth anniversary of the United Nations World Assembly on Ageing and the adoption of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, let us remind ourselves that our efforts on behalf of our older citizens have special meaning beyond the economic and social concerns related to our rapidly increasing ageing populations, as important as these considerations are.

Indeed, our efforts reflect our heartfelt appreciation and dedication to the dignity and well-being of those whose contributions and sacrifices have inspired us and have enabled us to reach the levels of progress in the human condition we know today.

Our older citizens represent not only a link to the past but a vital bridge to the future - in the depth of their experiences and in their longstanding adherence to the values representing the best traditions of our nations and peoples.

At the time of the World Assembly on Ageing 10 years ago, it was believed that population ageing was primarily a phenomenon of the industrialized nations of Europe, Asia, and North America. In at least 30 such countries,

(Mr. Sullivan, United States)

5 per cent or more of the entire population is aged 60 or over, and the past decade has witnessed intense public debate over issues directly related to ageing populations, such as income security and health care.

We now realize that population ageing is a global phenomenon. Mortality rates in most developing nations declined faster than expected over the past decade, with the result that many such nations now have life expectancies approaching - or even exceeding - those of developed nations. With continuing declines in fertility added to the equation, we have reached the point where the older populations of developing nations are now growing much more rapidly than those of the developed nations.

Of all the statistics I have seen relating to the growth of our older populations, the one that amazes me most is this: two-thirds of all the men and women who have lived beyond age 65 in the whole of human history are alive today!

The rapidly increasing numbers of older citizens present our nations and Governments with enormous new social and economic challenges. Each nation has its own unique problems and will require policies and programmes tailored to its own needs.

What clearly is in the best interest of all nations, however, is to establish as a major goal and priority the maintenance and restoration of the maximum degree of independence and self-sufficiency for each older citizen.

At the same time, we face the reality that public resources in most nations are already strained and will likely be more so in the foreseeable future. The only viable course of action under these circumstances is to broaden the base of support and to augment public resources from other sources - to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with private-sector

(Mr. Sullivan, United States)

businesses, foundations, civic and professional associations, and others - and to energize and empower local communities.

This is precisely the focus of a comprehensive new initiative launched last year by my Government: the National Eldercare Campaign. I will give you a brief synopsis of this programme because I believe its principles may be applied in many nations.

The first component of our National Eldercare Campaign is public awareness - the process of making Americans aware of the changing demographics and their implications.

Secondly, in recognition of the fact that our traditional system of social services cannot do the job alone, we are reaching out to mobilize organizations that traditionally have not had ageing agendas, such as business, labor, religious, educational and civic organizations.

The third component is Project CARE, the focus of which is to promote the formation of local community coalitions to develop and implement action plans to address the unmet needs of older persons in the community who are at risk of losing their independence.

And, fourthly, we are encouraging Americans - especially the majority of our older citizens who remain healthy and vigorous - to enroll as members of our Eldercare Volunteer Corps, created last year to serve at-risk older citizens.

In proclaiming Older Americans Month earlier this year, President Bush said:

> "The heart of a nation may well be judged by the amount of respect it has for its elders. Together, they have helped to preserve the rich legacy of freedom we enjoy today. Through their creativity and hard work, they developed technology that enabled us to cross new frontiers in

(Mr. Sullivan, United States)

space and science. What better way to thank our senior citizens than to ensure they have access to the opportunities, services and support they so richly deserve."

I offer my sincere appreciation to those responsible for the success of the World Assembly on Ageing and the implementation of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing. On behalf of the people of the United States, I offer our most cordial good wishes to you all.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of Mauritania, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. OULD MOHAMED MAHMOUD (Mauritania) (interpretation from French): I have already had the opportunity to express to Mr. Ganev and his predecessor, Ambassador Samir Shihabi, the congratulations and good wishes of the Group of African States, on whose behalf I am honoured to take part in the discussion on the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The African delegations were distressed to learn of the earthquake that struck the sister republic of Egypt, killing several hundred people and leaving several thousand others wounded or homeless. We would like to convey our condolences and our heartfelt sympathy to the families of the victims, to the fraternal Egyptian people, to Ambassador Nabil Elaraby and to all the other members of the Egyptian delegation.

The question of the ageing of the world population was addressed by the Assembly for the first time in 1948; but it is only since 1969 that it has been regularly considered in the framework of the agenda of our annual sessions.

(Mr. Ould Mohamed Mahmoud, Mauritania)

The adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing at the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly marked a high point in this ongoing process. In the 10 years since then there have been more and more consciousness-raising initiatives and activities, but we must acknowledge that the Plan's major objectives have not been attained.

However, the ageing of the population is now an established fact in most industrial societies and is increasingly evident in the developing countries. Statistics show that a million people reach the landmark age of 60 every month, and it is projected that by the year 2025 the elderly will represent 14 per cent of the total world population. Medical advances and the improvement of overall living conditions are responsible for this demographic revolution.

Ageing is extending more and more to the developing countries. In Africa and everywhere else it will accelerate in the coming years. This demographic change represents significant progress for mankind and a source of happiness for millions of human beings. It also provides a tremendous opportunity for the younger generations to benefit directly from the experience and knowledge of their elders, who can thus enlighten and enrich society and ensure a link between two eras, with no break between the past and the present.

At the same time, elderly people have particular needs, and legitimately expect them to be met. They have as much need for integration into social life as they do for nutrition and health care, housing and recreation. Even in the affluent countries, where social assistance is highly developed, those needs are not always met, and many elderly people are completely abandoned.

In the developing countries social relationships play a significant role, but the precarious economic and social situation affects all vulnerable

(Mr. Ould Mohamed Mahmoud, Mauritania)

groups, and particularly the elderly. This is true in Africa, where structural adjustment policies have weakened the infrastructures designed to serve the elderly population and reduced the capacity for assistance in all areas, including that of families caring for elderly people.

Such a situation is difficult to tolerate in view of the great esteem in which elderly people are held in Africa. They are a point of reference and a source of knowledge and wisdom. They are consulted on all the affairs of the community, and great importance is attached to their advice and counsel.

In a world beset with multiple crises, wars and increasing numbers of natural disasters, such as drought and earthquakes, solidarity is essential in all areas, and in particular vis-à-vis this population group, both out of sense of duty and because of the knowledge, wisdom and experience that the oldest among us possess. Such solidarity would serve to support the exercise of responsibility by those who are no longer young, and would sustain them through the ageing process.

The founding in 1989 of the African Society of Gerontology is a tribute to the role of the elderly and their exceptional place in African society. The danger now is that the economic depression is likely to test severely the traditional structures of solidarity.

In Africa, as in other regions of the world, ageing is a fact that must necessarily from now on be integrated into all development policies. As the General Assembly recommended in resolution 46/94, national targets for the year 2001 should be set. Those targets should take into account the traditions and potential of each country, but they should also seek to meet the needs of elderly people in all the regions of the world. The role of the

(Mr. Ould Mohamed Mahmoud, Mauritania)

family, the nucleus of society, should be bolstered and its resources strengthened so that it may continue to care properly for the elderly.

National strategies benefiting elderly people will, however, remain limited unless they are supported by effective and active international solidarity. That international solidarity should include the exchange of experience and expertise, and above all reform of current economic relationships that are detrimental to the developing countries. The establishment of international cooperation would ease the situation of the neediest countries and permit the implementation of programmes benefiting elderly people. The scene would thus be set for fulfilling the principles of the United Nations as spelled out in resolution 46/91.

In this framework and in this spirit, elderly people would be able to live better lives and young people could more happily look forward to the conditions awaiting them when they, too, have the opportunity to grow old.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of Turkey, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. AKSIN (Turkey): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Asian Group on the occasion of these international meetings marking the tenth anniversary of the World Assembly on Ageing and the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The decline of mortality and improvements in medical care, coupled with declining fertility, have dramatically changed the demographic structure of societies. The ageing of populations is now a world-wide phenomenon.

As surveys indicate, in the 75 years from 1950 to 2025 the world's elderly population will have increased from 200 million to 1.2 billion - that is, from 8 per cent to 14 per cent of the total population of the Earth.

(Mr. Aksin, Turkey)

One million persons cross the threshold of age 60 every month, 80 per cent of them in developing countries. This revolutionary trend affects the social and economic structure of societies and requires new national and international responses.

The tenth anniversary of the World Assembly on Ageing and the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing are a good occasion to review the progress made. We are all aware that, despite its usefulness and the efforts made at national and international levels, the Plan has not been adequately implemented, mainly due to economic and social problems affecting all countries.

The International Day for the Elderly, 1 October, was celebrated for the first time last year. It has become a major event in honour of the world's generation of wisdom, and has greatly contributed to an increased awareness of ageing issues.

The International Plan of Action has a new companion document: the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. Adopted last year by the General Assembly, those principles of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity for the elderly aim

"TO ADD LIFE TO THE YEARS THAT HAVE BEEN ADDED TO LIFE"

(resolution 46/91, annex)

Their implementation will ensure that ageing is productive for the elderly and for societies.

The tenth anniversary of the World Assembly on Ageing and of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing also offers an appropriate occasion for setting global targets on ageing for the year 2001. Such targets can provide a pragmatic focus for the broad goals of the International Plan

(Mr. Aksin, Turkey)

and help in accelerating its implementation. The draft global targets are now before us. The Asian Group welcomes these targets and supports their adoption.

Respect for the elderly is a common feature of the culture of all the Asian countries. In Asian culture the elderly maintain their positions of high esteem within the family and contribute to the family's welfare. By remaining a part of the family, the elderly have an opportunity to live their lives in dignity and fulfilment. Any action by the United Nations to enhance the position of the elderly in society will be given enthusiastic support by the Asian Group.

Before concluding, I should like to thank the national and international organizations which contributed to the process of developing both the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of Armenia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. ARZOUMANIAN (Armenia): It is a privilege to speak today on behalf of the Eastern European States on this tenth anniversary of the United Nations International Plan of Action on Ageing. In the ten years since the adoption of the Plan, we have witnessed an increase in worldwide awareness that ageing is an issue that needs to be a part of the policy agendas of member States.

Changing demographics have added an element of urgency to the programmes which need to be adopted internationally. In 1950, there were 200 million people aged 60 and over; today there are approximately 500 million, and in the year 2025 that number will have increased to 1.2 billion. This dramatic change in demographics requires serious attention and the implementation of proposals that benefit the elderly.

Concretely, the Secretary-General has pointed out in his report "Global targets on ageing for the year 2001: a practical strategy" (A/47/339) that progress needs to be made in the areas of national infrastructure reform, health, housing, family, education, social welfare and income security. We support the recommendations outlined in this report. We would also like to express our support today for the draft resolution "Proclamation on Ageing", expressing hope in humanity's coming of age. We agree wholeheartedly with the ideas expressed in the resolution.

Reform of national infrastructures to develop and promote strategies on ageing is particularly significant for the members of the Eastern European Group. We have embarked upon on a major programme of structural reforms, including privatization, fiscal and monetary restructuring and price and trade liberalization. The benefits of these reforms will begin to improve living conditions significantly only after a difficult period, which may last several

(Mr. Arzoumanian, Armenia)

years. Of course the most vulnerable groups of society are the most severely affected during these difficult times. For us, the elderly and the disabled are the groups of people who need the most attention and for whom we are working to create an effective social safety net.

We need to replace the pension and income-security plans established under the formerly centrally planned economies, which as a result of the staggering inflation rate in our region do not provide sufficient income levels.

As these new social, economic and political systems are being created and the laws of each country are being redrafted, it is important that policies and programmes for the elderly and the disabled be integrated into the new political and legal structures as they are developed and that they be embraced by the newly created social safety net.

Statistics show that life expectancy amongst the Eastern European countries lags behind that in other countries in the industrial world. To confront this challenge, we must upgrade our health care systems. Cardiovascular disease has been one of the most common health problems in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Much has been learned about heart disease, and we must find ways to incorporate these advances into treatment in our health care systems.

As we look to the future, we have reason to be optimistic about the progress that can be made in promoting strategies and policies to improve the quality of life for the elderly. In the last few years, several developments have contributed to increased international awareness and have paved the way for progress. In 1990, the United Nations General Assembly designated 1 October as the International Day for the Elderly. This annual acknowledgement will bring greater visibility to the agenda of the ageing.

(Mr. Arzoumanian, Armenia)

In addition, as a result of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, several institutions and funds have been established which have already yielded positive results and will no doubt continue to do so. In 1988, the International Institute on Ageing, based in Malta, was founded. It has played a major role in providing direction for global training initiatives on ageing. The African Society of Gerontology, established in 1989, has a role to play in the development and implementation of a regional programme on ageing. A World Fund for Ageing, created by the Banyan Fund Association in 1991, will focus on promoting activities enabling the elderly to remain independent and contribute to society. These are important new developments.

There is also the United Nations Trust Fund for the Ageing, which has distributed over $1 million in seed money to approximately 50 projects involving training, needs assessment programmes and policy formation. The projects initially funded by the Trust Fund have attracted additional resources from Governments, non-governmental organizations and foundations. We would like to express our support not only for the United Nations Trust Fund but also for all the non-governmental organizations that have contributed time and money to programmes directed at the elderly. The importance of the role of non-governmental organizations cannot be underestimated, as their support is often instrumental in the success of many programmes.

Finally, tribute should be paid to the United Nations Centre on Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, which has been the focal point and coordinator of all international activity concerning the International Plan of Action on Ageing. We commend the work of the Centre.

In conclusion, we are encouraged by the progress that has been made in the last ten years. It may not be as great as we would like, but that is because the goals and ideals of the United Nations remain high. I am certain

(Mr. Arzoumanian, Armenia)

that at the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing we will be celebrating even greater progress and concrete achievements.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of Uruguay, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. PIRIZ BALLON (Uruguay): The Latin American and Caribbean Group feels honoured to participate in the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, an issue to which we attach great importance: Our commitment is evidenced by the fact that it was a country of our region - Argentina - that, with remarkable foresight, called attention to this issue by introducing a draft Declaration of the Rights of the Elderly as long ago as 1948.

From that time, a slow journey began in search of approaches to the issue of ageing in its diverse dimensions. The World Assembly on Ageing held in 1982, resulting in the adoption of the International Plan of Action, constitutes without doubt a milestone on this road.

That event, which we are celebrating today, redefined the importance of the issue of ageing, encouraging Governments to take measures to attain the objectives established in the Plan, thus leading to the establishment of national mechanisms aimed at setting policies on this matter.

In spite of these positive aspects, we should not forget that one of the major concerns of the Plan of Action - that is, to ensure attention to the elderly in the areas of income, nutrition, housing and health - is still far from being adequately addressed in developing countries. In this respect, we can say that the Plan suffered from a lack of realism.

(Mr. Píriz Ballon, Uruguay)

Owing to the economic crisis of the 1980s - which still continues - in most countries of Latin America and the Caribbean public expenditure was reduced in the social sector, hindering the implementation of measures to improve the situation of the elderly, since that situation cannot be isolated from the economic environment.

On 1 October last year we celebrated for the first time the International Day for the Elderly. We see this as an encouraging sign, in view of the need to draw the public's attention to the increase in the elderly population and the economic and social consequences this may entail if we do not once and for all understand that the elderly are not passive beings, but that they should be considered as agents of development, with great productive potential and a store of experience that should be used for the benefit of society.

Consequently, we regard it as necessary to give priority to public information campaigns aimed at banishing once and for all the negative stereotypes associated with the figure of the elderly person.

In this context, we wish to express our support for the recently created Banyan Fund, which has among its objectives the promotion of activities to enable the elderly to maintain their independence and contribute to society within the context of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, using private resources for this purpose. When we speak of this Fund, we must mention the important part played in creating it by an eminent representative of our region, Ambassador Julia Alvarez of the Dominican Republic.

The demographic data available to us speak for themselves. It is estimated that in the year 2000 there will be 614 million aged people in the world, of which 60 per cent will live in developing countries.

(Mr. Píriz Ballon, Uruguay)

In 1980 there were more than 23 million elderly people in Latin America and the Caribbean, while the forecast is a total of 40 million for the year 2000 and 93 million for the year 2025. At the same time, in Latin America, life expectancy at birth will increase to 71.8 years in the period 2020 to 2025 by contrast with 51.2 years in the period 1950 to 1955.

These data show that Latin America has ceased to be a "young region", as it was traditionally described, since it is undergoing an accelerated demographic transition towards lower birth and mortality rates.

Many countries of our region will be facing rapid growth in their ageing populations without being properly prepared for this in terms of health care and social services. The growth of their elderly populations will then require more human and material resources, as well as a better use of those already existing.

Our countries will have to make a great effort to convert into something positive what in different circumstances could be seen as a negative factor in the process of development. In order to attain this, greater international assistance will be required, such as is offered by the United Nations Trust Fund for Ageing.

At the same time, we should point out that the regional programme of the Pan-American Health Organization, though only recently created and with limited resources, is playing an important role in assisting the countries of the region to develop coherent programmes in which general health services are incorporated, along with all social programmes focused on the welfare of this sector of the population.

We also believe that it would be very important to create an institution for ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean, similar to the one in Malta, in order to meet the needs of the region.

(Mr. Píriz Ballon, Uruguay)

An important aspect that should be mentioned is the situation of the elderly woman. It is estimated that in the year 2025 there will be 604 million women over the age of 60 in the world, and that in the less developed countries 70 per cent of women will be living in poverty. For this reason, we agree with the Pan-American Health Organization regarding the need to promote research into the living conditions of elderly women and their health and social service needs.

In previous sessions of the General Assembly we approved the principles of the United Nations for the ageing. The five basic norms underpinning those principles are: independence, participation, care, self- fulfillment and dignity, and these are the central core of what we might describe as the human rights of the ageing.

In order for them to have some practical force, we must create the necessary conditions to enable them to be exercised effectively. It is for this reason that we support the targets on ageing for the year 2001 that have been proposed.

The ageing of the population is an inevitable fact from which we must try to draw the most positive aspects. Hence, the need to redefine the position of the elderly in our societies, fully involving them in the development process.

This should be our commitment in order to ensure for all the productive and dignified old age that we all deserve.

The PRESIDENT: I call on the representative of Denmark, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States.

Mr. HAAKONSEN (Denmark): I have the honour to speak today on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States in commemorating the tenth anniversary of the World Assembly on Ageing and the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The International Plan of Action, adopted by the World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna in 1982 and endorsed by the General Assembly the same year, was the first policy instrument on ageing adopted at a global level. United Nations specialized agencies and bodies, governments, experts on the elderly and non-governmental organizations participated in drafting the Plan in which principles and recommendations on meeting the needs of the elderly were set out. There can be no doubt that the World Assembly was instrumental in raising awareness worldwide of an issue of growing importance - the situation of the elderly.

The population of the world is ageing rapidly. In the 75 years from 1950 to 2025, the world's elderly population, defined as persons from 60 years and older, will have increased from 200 million to 1.2 billion, or from 8 to 14 per cent of the total global population. The total world population will have grown by a factor of little more than three and the elderly will have grown by a factor of six.

The dramatic change in the demographic structure of society will have significant consequences, which will have to be taken into account in the overall social and economic planning.

(Mr. Haakonsen, Denmark)

Last year the General Assembly took another historic step in adopting the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, whose purpose is

"To add life to the years that have been added to life". (resolution 46/91, annex)

The Principles state that opportunities must be provided for elderly people to participate in and contribute to the ongoing activities of society and that the fullest possible assistance must be given to ensure that the needs of the aged are met. The Assembly also called for a pragmatic focus to be put on the broad and ideal goals of the Plan of Action, in the form of global targets on ageing for the year 2001. These draft targets are currently before the Assembly. When adopted, they will support national responses to the ageing of populations and give further impetus to the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of the Dominican Republic, who will introduce the draft resolution contained in document A/47/L.5/Rev.1.

Mrs. TAVARES de ALVAREZ (Dominican Republic) (interpretation from Spanish): On behalf of the delegations of Angola, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Gambia, Grenada, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Mali, Malta, Morocco, Mongolia, Paraguay, Senegal, Suriname, Turkey, Uruguay and my own country, as well as the delegations that have joined the list - those of Cameroon, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, India and Togo - I have the honour of introducing, for the consideration of the General Assembly, the United Nations Proclamtion on Ageing, which expresses hope in this new era in which mankind is achieving

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maturity. The sponsors of the Proclamation sincerely hope that it will be adopted unanimously.

We should like to offer the reasons underlying the appropriateness of and the necessity for this Proclamation.

We are meeting when times are promising, but there is a limit to the amount of time we have to fulfil the promise. One could sum up our situation in a few words and a few numbers. The words offer promise, but the numbers speak of limits.

Today, in discussing older people, we use vivid words such as "out of the mainstream", "productive", "wisdom", "experienced" and "intergenerational". These terms are replacing our old, worn-out, antique, old-fashioned way of speaking about the elderly. The new words represent the dawning of a new consciousness about ageing and its implications for everyone, regardless of age.

This has happened not a moment too soon, because the numbers suggest that if we persist in our out-of-date frame of mind we shall not get the full picture until it is too late. There is an "agequake" almost upon us, and we had better see it for what it.

There is no lack of numbers to measure the extent of the ageing of populations. By the year 2001 more than 10 per cent of the world's population will be over 60. That figure will top 25 per cent in some places. Between 1950 and 2025, the world's population will have increased by a factor of three, the number of those 60 and above by a factor of six, and the number of those over 80 - the very elderly - by a factor of 10. Of those turning 60 every month, 80 per cent live in our third world.

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One could cite numbers indefinitely, but after a while they become mind-numbing. There is something that is more important: to what do these numbers add up? The answer is: a basic change in the nature of the population of the world. In no more than a few decades - whether in cities, towns or villages - the range of people that one is likely to encounter will look very different. In fact, the population mix will look as it has never looked before.

For better or for worse, this change will affect the pool of human resources available to do the work of society, and it will alter the mixture of social needs that we shall have to meet. In other words, our institutions are now organized to deal with a world that will soon pass.

The question then arises: what have we done, what are we doing and what shall we do in the future to deal with this new world of ageing? One option we do not have is to do little or nothing just because there is still time. This is no more sensible than ignoring threats to the environment just because they will not have destroyed all life on this planet by this time next year.

Ten years ago we began to take these numbers seriously. In 1982 the United Nations convened a World Assembly on Ageing. One hundred and twenty-four nations met in Vienna at the first major conference on the ageing of populations. That Assembly fulfilled its most basic task: to shine an intense spotlight on a quiet, and so far relatively unnoticed, social transformation.

The Assembly was especially impressive because in our developing countries more immediate and pressing needs, such as the need to maintain a

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basic standard of living for all segments of the population, often overshadowed the first rumblings of an impending world "agequake".

The Assembly also sought to mobilize the world community to begin to move from awareness to active commitment to the social requirements of a new age. It produced an International Plan of Action on Aging, which we are justifiably celebrating today.

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Our celebration relates not so much to the specifics of the Plan of Action, but rather to its visionary spirit. This was, after all, something of an initial foray into the new world of ageing, a first attempt to do what we needed to do. We were carefully feeling our way, willing to make some mistakes, eager to learn.

We have learned a great deal. Permit me to suggest that one of the most important things we have discovered is that drawing the world's attention to the issues of ageing is not the same thing as creating the political will to deal with them. For example, many of the Plan's prescriptions were expensive: we asked national Governments to give money. Predictably, not nearly enough funds were forthcoming. Governments do not generally allocate money to build reservoirs when they have all they can do to stem the flood-waters that are currently all around them. Fending off hunger took precedence over supporting old age.

In our first large-scale attempt to deal with population ageing, we did not sufficiently distinguish between the awareness we had of the problem and full consciousness of its implications. Awareness is to consciousness as political interest is to political action. Knowing what results are needed is not the same thing as being creatively stirred to the point of doing what is necessary to achieve these ends.

As we shall be discussing at greater length this afternoon, our arsenal of responses to the potential social disruption posed by global ageing has been considerably enlarged and diversified over the past decade. The new notion of productive ageing, the discovery, that is, that older people are an excellent resource that may be employed on their own behalf and to the benefit of the whole of society, and the realization that Governments need to

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cooperate with non-governmental organizations and with the private sector offer us a multitude of alternatives to the simple spending of more tax money to achieve the same result.

But even these new and exciting possibilities will require that we mobilize all of society's resources in a coordinated effort to deal constructively with issues raised by global ageing. Ageing in itself is not a problem; it should be seen as a challenge. The real problem is creating and creatively directing the necessary political will to take up this challenge and meet it successfully. Ageing must be seen as an important, and urgent matter deserving of attention. We need first to set in place the moral, psychological and intellectual infrastructure that is essential before we dare hope that any initiatives will have a broad and lasting effect.

Summoning the necessary political will to cope with global ageing in the coming decades will require a revolution in both thinking and feeling. There must be a change not only in what everyone perceives to be the place of the elderly in the social fabric but also in what everyone believes that place should be. Without such a change, we shall never be able to effect the specific changes needed to adapt successfully to a new era of ageing.

In this respect the adoption of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons last year (resolution 46/91) may have been the single most important thing that we have done till now to put a human face on ageing. Basic changes in society must be certified by the social institutions that count the most. Social relationships will not change permanently unless those changes are deeply embedded and universally recognized in the social matrix. These United Nations Principles represent an essential step in that direction. They begin

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to provide the moral and social underpinnings for our struggle, affirming and authenticating our goals.

In this spirit, we suggest that the International Day for the Elderly has been such a success that the next and inevitable step is to declare a year for the elderly. Since the true era of ageing will dawn along with the beginning of the new century, we propose that we declare the year 1999 as the international year of the elderly.

We must continue to take with utmost seriousness issues raised by the ageing of populations. Let us not lull ourselves into thinking we are dealing with something of secondary importance because no one is firing bullets. Anything that destabilizes society can eventually lead to armed conflict, even if indirectly. If we do not pay enough attention to the distant rumblings of this "agequake", more ominous forces could ultimately shake the Earth. We can face the future confidently and reasonably, trying to foresee problems and prevent them before they occur. Alternatively, we can ignore them, fail to prevent them and try to solve them by force of arms.

The Proclamation we have introduced confirms the seriousness of our intent. The prestige of this great body further authenticates our aims. The Proclamation offers something tangible as the fruit of our labours at this plenary meeting; it emphasizes the importance of older people in all societies and underscores the global targets that we have set. We urge its unanimous adoption by the Assembly.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.